

**Illinois Early Learning Council
Data, Research, and Evaluation Committee
Tuesday, May 14
10:00 am - 12:00 pm**

Ounce of Prevention Fund
33 W. Monroe, Suite 2400
Chicago, IL

Meeting Minutes

Meeting Participants

In-Person: Carrie Bires, Bernard Cesarone, Kim Collins, Paula Corrigan-Halpern, Angela Farwig, Serah Fatani, Karen Freel, Theresa Hawley, Harriette Herrera, Larry Joseph, Lauri Morrison-Frichtl, Tony Raden, Elliot Regenstein, Dawn Thomas

Phone: David Alexander, Dan Harris, Lisa Hood, Beth Mascitti-Miller, Susan Monroe, Teri Talan, Cindy Zumwalt

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the March 5, 2013 meeting were formally approved.

3. Federal Update

a. Early Learning Challenge Round Three

Illinois has received \$17 million in Early Learning Challenge Round Three funds, but with sequestration, the amount actually received will likely be around \$16 million. Round Three funds are being used to bring states up to 75% of their original Early Learning Challenge request – Illinois had received \$34 million previously and including Round Three funds will have received about \$50 million total. The funds must be used in conjunction with QRIS, so any data work funded through Round Three must be tied to the QRIS.

The timeline from the federal government is quite short in terms of submitting plans for how to spend the Round Three money. The Governor's Office of Early Childhood Development (OECD) expects to receive directions within 30 days and then will have 30 days from then to respond with a plan. OECD has been receiving and is encouraging suggestions about possible uses for Round Three funds. OECD plans to meet with the leadership team and then present plans to the ELC Executive Committee at the end of June.

b. SLDS FY14 Proposal

There is \$36 million for early childhood data systems included in the president's budget. Elliot is working with the Early Childhood Data Collaborative to see if other states should collaborate on advocacy regarding what this funding should look like.

c. President's Proposal

The funds available under this proposal would not reach Illinois for at least a year at the earliest, so this still in a very preliminary stage.

4. JSI RFI

The JSI RFI has been released, and a copy of it was shared with the committee. The DHS Procurement Office is accepting questions until May 22. The deadline to apply is May 30. Applications will be collected by DHS and also shared with OECD. OECD will work with the core team to determine who should review the responses, which will also be made available to the public and the DRE Committee in some form. The core team will use the RFI responses to develop the RFP.

Estimates for building the data system differ: a custom solution is estimated to cost much more than an “off-the-shelf” option. The RFI should give us more information on these options so there is some indication of cost, but it still may not be entirely clear.

5. Research Database

The Committee’s work plan calls for it to propose the development of a database to track relevant research on early care and education and allow Illinois stakeholders to readily find information about early childhood research to support their work. IECAM provided a draft document to the committee with some key questions as well as a few tentative decisions about how such an effort might be organized. The Committee discussed the potential design of an Illinois-specific database, and the discussion included the following:

Tentative Decisions Regarding Initial Considerations

- Ongoing, completed, and future studies will be included.
- Users can search for research by data elements as well as topics/keywords.
- A simple taxonomy will be used (rather than hierarchical).

Questions/Discussion Regarding Initial Considerations

- Abstracts: A tentative decision was reached to include abstracts for at least some of the studies that are included. One possible approach for abstracts is to include them if they are already available. Or if the author of the study wants to provide an abstract, they can do so. Most journal articles will already include an abstract; conference papers may not.
- Other issues to consider include: (1) the system for adding new terms to the taxonomy; (2) processes for updating the database; and (3) should the database include documents themselves or links to documents (or a combination).

Keywords and Additional Identifying Fields

- Each study will have keywords assigned to it, along with additional identifying fields that will allow users to find information on other aspects of the research study besides topic. Examples of additional identifying fields from ERIC were discussed (see handout) and the following questions/issues were raised:

Q: Is the database meant to be a national resource or an Illinois resource?

A: It is seen primarily as an Illinois resource but will include national studies. We want to be comprehensive in terms of state research but should not restrict only to Illinois.

Q: Will there be demographic items included in the search terms such that users can find research on certain populations, etc.?

A: Yes, users could search for the study’s subjects or sample.

Q: What is meant by “policy documents” as referenced in the “Type of Research/Research Methodology” field?

A: This refers to documents that are focused on advocacy and are not based on a study. There had been a tentative decision not to include policy documents unless they are research on policy. However, it was also noted that including policy documents might be a way to differentiate this database from other databases as well as prove useful in helping shape a research agenda.

Q: Will research on young children that is not specifically education-focused be included?

A: Yes, for example public health research.

Q: How are we going to make this database manageable?

A: This is a big concern. For instance, we cannot include every piece of past research that is relevant. The database is not meant to be a comprehensive source of all early childhood research; instead it is meant to gather critical research and identify research gaps.

Q: Will the database include studies written in a language other than English?

A: Yes. Some Illinois studies are written in a language other than English. Including non-English studies is a challenge because there are many international studies but we should include seminal research.

Purpose of Database

- The committee discussed the need to look closely at the purpose of the research database. The DRE Committee is charged with being a resource to other committees as well as advising on a research agenda to inform the Early Learning Council and funders. The ELC is the driver of what is deemed relevant for inclusion in the database, while committee members and other early childhood stakeholders are the audience for the database.

Quality Discussion

- The committee initially reached out to Harriet Dichter about criteria for evaluating the quality of research to be included in the database but the document we received was not what we were looking for.
- We are not going to have the staff time to make individual determinations on quality. It was suggested that one way to indicate quality is to tag documents as “peer-reviewed.” This is both an easy and meaningful metric. However, a lot of early childhood research is not found in peer-reviewed journals. Thus, we should use “peer-reviewed” as a descriptor, not a standard for inclusion.
- Another resource on quality metrics is the What Works Clearinghouse, which has a document that could be used as a reference.
- We want the database to be useful to an Illinois audience, so our general focus should be on organizing it in a way that is helpful to that audience and ensuring it includes useful materials, such as longitudinal studies and needs assessments.

Committee members were encouraged to provide additional feedback on the research database following the meeting.

6. Hard to Reach Subcommittee Data Discussion

The Hard to Reach Subcommittee of the Family and Community Engagement Committee is developing a data-driven approach to identifying “hard to reach” populations. The subcommittee is charged with increasing access for these populations, so they are trying to capture who is currently being served. It brought this topic to the DRE Committee in the spirit of cross-collaboration: these populations should be on the committee’s radar as it works to set up the Unified Data System; in addition, the subcommittee would also appreciate feedback from the committee on how these populations are defined and/or potential data sources that could be used to measure these populations.

The committee reviewed a draft document developed by the Hard to Reach Subcommittee that contained the following: (1) categories of hard to reach populations; (2) reasons why they are hard to reach; and (3) data that might provide information about the category that are available or could be obtained. The committee noted that geography is important – there is a big difference between getting a statewide estimate and local data. IECAM can be an important resource here, but it depends on the level of data that is required. Head Start collects a lot of data and serves hard to reach populations, so they can be a resource as well.

Committee members were encouraged to share the draft document with others and provide any additional feedback on the hard to reach population categories and/or potential data sources following the meeting.

7. Poverty Data Discussion

The number of children living in poverty in the state was discussed at the last ELC Executive Committee meeting. There are different metrics used to indicate this figure, such as Medicaid births, Census estimates, and the poverty grant used in the state’s school funding formula.

In general, there is a lot of confusion about the distinction between low-income and poverty. One hundred percent of the Federal Poverty Level (FPL) and below is considered poverty, while low income generally means 200% FPL (although not always). The most reliable poverty count is found in Census estimates; however this is an imperfect measure for several reasons, for instance because it is based on self-reported income data.

In terms of calculating the number of children that are living in poverty and/or are low-income, the Census estimates on FPL found on IECAM are much lower than the number of Medicaid births, while the poverty grant is an entirely different measure. ISBE has two counts that could be relevant: (1) number of children eligible for free/reduced school lunch and (2) the DHS count. The school lunch count is considered a low-income count, not a poverty count. The DHS count is used to calculate poverty grants and is based on participation in DHS programs (Medicaid, food stamps, TANF, etc.) The DHS count should also not be considered a poverty count; rather, it is a low-income count.

Additional points of discussion regarding poverty data included:

FPL

- Head Start uses FPL to indicate poverty, as does Race to the Top. One advantage to using FPL is that it is determined consistently across the country. However, FPL only captures people that can be counted. In addition, in federally-funded programs, eligibility is determined based on monthly income (not annual) and income can vacillate between the poverty levels.

- CCAP eligibility is 185% FPL; Chicago Ready to Learn also used 185% FPL.
- OECD uses census numbers on FPL for submissions to the federal government; however, they recognize that this cannot always be compared to program data as programs may not be using the same measure.

Free and Reduced Lunch

- Families do not have to provide proof of income to qualify for free/reduced lunch.
- There are issues with combining children that qualify for free lunch with those that qualify for reduced lunch into one measure because there is a difference in terms of income level. CPS separates free from reduced lunch (data can be combined or broken out separately), but in the school report card data it is combined. Medicaid births are an even larger group than this.

School Funding Formula

- The 50-year old school funding formula that is being used to calculate poverty has not kept up with need. However, even if it is flawed, it is what people are used to and is useful in tracking changes over time.

PFA Enrollment

- The highest priority for PFA enrollment is “at-risk” children, which is not just based on income, but can include other factors. This was an intentional choice.

After discussion, the committee decided that it would not produce or recommend anything in writing on this issue at this time. It was noted that this might be a good topic for a presentation at an ELC meeting.

8. ISBE/CPS Data Collection Efforts re: Bilingual and Other Requirements

The committee asked representatives from ISBE and CPS present at the meeting for an update on any efforts to collect data regarding the bilingual requirements that will go into effect in 2014 and offered its assistance in these efforts. There is concern that school districts are behind in terms of being able to comply with the 2014 deadline.

CPS currently collects certification data for teachers and ELL data for students. Currently, CPS does not plan to add additional fields for the bilingual requirements. CPS can look at the classroom level to see how many ELL students are in a classroom and what the certification of the teacher is to make sure there is a match between ELL students and the teacher. CPS is looking at what professional development is needed for teachers in order to meet the mandate to have a certified bilingual teacher in front of ELL students. This is evaluated at the office level, not at the district-wide level. Program directors have this information as well.

ISBE has been adding the bilingual requirements to its compliance checklist so it is a part of monitoring. Monitors will be looking at teacher certifications in terms of ELL. Right now, ISBE is monitoring the 04 certification and whether a home language survey and appropriate screening has been completed (if indicated). ISBE collects ELL information on students and the educator licensure system will collect information on the teacher’s certification, but currently SIS does not connect early childhood teacher and student data at the classroom level. ISBE did this at the kindergarten level for the first time this year. There is capacity to do this in the future for early childhood, but given limited resources, it is not anticipated this will be rolled out in the near-term.

It was noted that this was a good starting place for this conversation, and that the committee is in favor of allocating resources to this issue to ensure that the 2014 mandate is met.

ACTION ITEMS FROM 5/14 MEETING

- **By the end of June, committee members will send comments/feedback on the research database to IECAM/staffer.**
- **Co-chairs/IECAM will have a phone call to discuss the research database before the next meeting.**
- **Set the next meeting to discuss the research database, including a decision plan and any disagreements.**
- **Committee members will send feedback on the definitions of the hard to reach populations and/or potential data sources to staffer for distribution to IECAM/Hard to Reach Subcommittee.**
- **Staffer will send out link to Letter to the Editor from Larry Joseph re: education funding.**